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AUTHOR White, Barbara L.; Daniel, Larry G.
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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to devise and provide validity and reliability data for scores on an instrument measuring attitudes toward school violence and to develop importance ratings of the items based on data from teachers in a high school that had experienced a highly publicized violent episode. Two independent samples were used. Based on the factor analysis of data from sample 1 (n=370 education graduate students), 4 factors were extracted representing meaningful subscales: (1) causes of violence; (2) responses to school violence; (3) profile of the violent student; and (4) extent of violence. Reliability coefficients for scores on the four subscales ranged from 0.69 to 0.90. Based on data from sample 2 (n=234 parents and students), subscale scores were analyzed to determine which subscales were rated most differently by the parent and student participants. Discriminant analyses indicated a statistically significant moderate effect, with parents and students most different on the media influences and social influences subscales. (Author/SLD)

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Development of a Measure of Attitudes Toward School Violence

Barbara L. White
University of Southern Mississippi

Larry G. Daniel
University of North Florida

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Larry Daniel

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Abstract

The purposes of the present study were (a) to devise and provide validity and reliability data for scores on an instrument measuring attitudes toward school violence, (b) to develop "importance ratings" of the items based on data from teachers in a high school that had experienced a highly publicized violent episode. Two independent samples were utilized. Based on the factor analysis of data from Sample 1 (N = 370 education graduate students), four factors were extracted representing meaningful subscales: "causes of school violence," "responses to school violence," "profile of the violent student," and "extent of violence." Reliability coefficients for scores on the four subscales ranged from .69 to .90. Based on data from Sample 2 (N = 234 parents and students), subscale scores were analyzed to determine which subscales were rated most differently by the parent and student participants. Discriminant analysis indicated a statistically significant moderate effect, with parents and students most different on the media influences and social influences subscales.

Development of a Measure of Attitudes Toward School Violence

In modern societies, schools are perhaps superseded only by the family in their importance in maintaining and perpetuating the culture and communicating the values, beliefs, and norms of the society. Consequently, schools are often perceived of as safe havens to which students experiencing even the worst of home or community environments may turn for comfort and direction. However, one need look only very perfuntorily at the condition of schooling today to determine that schools are not always the safe havens for youth we wish them to be.

In fact, school violence has become so commonplace (Crews & Counts, 1997; National Education Association, 1991; National School Board Association, 1994) that the public no longer wonders if violence will happen, but when and to what degree it will happen. Moreover, highly publicized episodes of school violence resulting in the injury and even death of students and teachers have raised public consciousness of the problem. In an attempt to determine those factors that contribute to the increase in violence, professionals and lay persons alike have no shortage of opinions. Explanations as diverse as the availability of handguns, dysfunctional families, increasing depiction of violence in television, motion pictures, and musical lyrics, and increase in the number of children and youth belonging to cults and gangs have been proposed.

According to Department of Justice (1991) statistics, 9% of public, 7% of private, and 6% of non-sectarian school students reported being victims of violent acts in 1989. Additionally, media reports indicate that school violence is a national problem; no region

is excluded. In a National School Board Association survey (1994), of 1,216 administrators, 54% of suburban and 64% of urban school officials reported more violent acts in their schools than 5 years before. Communities--large, small, urban, suburban, and rural--are struggling with campus confrontations.

In the face of increasing violence, schools are implementing a variety of policies aimed at improving the safety of the nation's schools. These policies are predicated upon a variety of assumptions regarding the roots of school violence. Further, these policies have focused upon such diverse measures as placement of police on school campuses, utilization of metal detectors, implementation of conflict management activities and curricula, and enactment and enforcement of "zero tolerance" laws regarding possession of weapons or engagement in violent acts on school property.

As Tyack and Cuban (1995) noted, educational reforms are typically sponsored by individuals and agencies outside the public schools. Reforms related to school violence are no exception. In fact, although some of these reforms have been the result of "grass roots" solutions to the problem, many policies have been the result of "top down" mandates (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). All of this attention to the problem at various levels has served to raise the level of awareness of the problem of school violence among educators, parents, students and the community at large.

Purposes of the Study

The two related purposes of the present study were (a) to devise and provide validity and reliability data for scores on an instrument measuring attitudes toward school violence, and (b) to compare attitudes of students and parents toward school

violence based on subscale scores on the attitudes toward violence instrument, with the sample selected from a high school that had previously experienced a highly publicized violent episode.

Method

Two independent samples were utilized in the present study (N's = 370 and 234). Sample 1 consisted of graduate students in education, all of whom were also teachers or administrators in K-12 educational settings, at two southern universities. Sample 1 participants were largely female (n = 255 [69%]) and Caucasian (n = 285 [77%]), with African American students (n = 85) also included in the sample. Sample 2 (n = 234) was comprised of 184 students from a high school in the southern United States that had experienced a highly publicized violent episode involving use of firearms and the death of several students in the recent past, along with 50 parents from the school. Students in sample 2 were 52% female (n = 96) and 48% male (n = 88). Students were broken down by ethnicity as follows: 143 White/Caucasian (78%), 38 African American (21%), and 3 other (1%). Students were relatively evenly spread across grade levels—9^{th} grade n = 53 (29%), 10^{th} grade n = 40 (22%), 11^{th} grade n = 39 (21%), and 12^{th} grade n = 52 (28%). Participants were largely female (n = 255[69%]) and Caucasian (n = 285 [77%]). Of the 38 sample 2 participants, 28 (74%) were female, and 35 (92%) were Caucasian. Parents in sample 2 were 58% Caucasian and 62% female.

All volunteers (both samples) were asked to complete the Violence in Schools Survey (see item text in Table 1), a 69-item instrument based on previous research literature and ideas germane to aggression and violence in schools. Volunteers used a

five-point Likert scale for each of the 69 items. Response options ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Participants were assured anonymity of their responses and were asked not to put their names on the survey.

Data from Sample 1 were subjected to exploratory factor analyses and alpha reliability analyses in order to develop initial information regarding the psychometric properties of scores generated by the instrument. Sample 2 data were summarized using descriptive statistics and comparison of parent and student responses using discriminant analysis.

Results

Based on the factor analysis of data from Sample 1, four factors were extracted which represented meaningful subscales of the instrument: "tendency toward violence," "media influences," "social influences," "mental and mind-altering influences." Scores across all 69 attitudinal items yielded an alpha reliability coefficient of .91. Reliability coefficients for scores on the four subscales ranged from .69 to .90.

For sample 2 data, subscale scores were formed based on the factor analytic results from the previous round of data analysis. Items shown to be salient with the four factors from Sample 1 were summed, and the total was divided by the number of items on the subscale, resulting in a value between 1 and 5 for each subscale. These scores (see Table 2) were summarized for students and parents, and served as the discriminating variables in the discriminant analysis.

The discriminant analysis yielded a single discriminant function indicating a statistically significant moderate effect size of approximately 21% (Wilks' lambda = .79;

chi-square = 53.5; $p < .001$). The discriminant structure coefficients were consulted to further understand the statistical effect. Media influences was the best discriminating variable (structure coefficient = .76) followed by social influences (structure coefficient = .52). Tendency toward violence and mental/mind altering influences were considerably poorer discriminating variables, having structure coefficients of -.27 and .11, respectively.

Discussion

The instrument developed as a part of the present study is a potentially useful tool for measuring teachers', students', and parents' perceptions of school violence. The four factors identified via the factor analysis are meaningful constructs related to the school violence domain, and the reliability data suggest that the instrument can yield internally consistent scores. The instrument offers promise to researchers in study of policy implementation regarding school violence though further refinement of the items and additional validity studies are needed. The results of the discriminant analyses indicated that both media and social influences are perceived differently by parents and students, with parents viewing media influences as more important than students, and students viewing social influences as more important than parents.

Table 1
Varimax-Rotated Principal Components Solution

	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Factor IV
America is failing to communicate standard values (Q44).	**.707**	.315	-.019	-.048
Families are experiencing a reduction in values (Q45).	**.685**	.099	.002	-.276
There is an increase of violence in society (Q57).	**.681**	.117	-.012	-.005
Family values have changed (Q46).	**.681**	.036	-052	.005
America is experiencing a decline in moral values (Q43).	**.680**	.155	-.138	-.107
American values have changed (Q47).	**.660**	.080	-.053	-.035
The need to control anger is essential today (Q28).	**.610**	.028	.034	.048
"Copy catting of violence has become a major problem (Q15).	**.610**	.233	.189	.012
Violence is overly publicized (Q24).	**.603**	.061	-.101	.193
Potential for more violence in schools causes concern (Q2).	**.581**	.351	-.062	.178
America is experiencing a devaluation of human life (Q42).	**.580**	.214	-.099	-.203
There is more violence in the media (Q58).	**.573**	.227	-.046	-.140
Today's students have poor conflict management skills which contribute to school violence (Q27).	**.567**	.134	.065	.048
Conflict management is critical today (Q29).	**.553**	.041	.207	-.265
Violence in schools has escalated (Q65).	**.553**	.022	-.266	.056
Violence is schools causes me concern (Q1).	**.506**	.455	-.054	.212
Students seem to devalue life (Q30).	**.498**	.155	.057	-.049
There is more violence today than in previous years (Q23).	**.487**	.084	-.096	.116
America is too tolerant of violence (Q41).	**.485**	.250	-.039	-.150
Attitudes toward violence in our society is a problem (Q3).	**.480**	.436	-.144	.147
The inability to control anger causes violent reactions (Q26).	**.463**	-.115	-.037	.306
"Chasing the mighty dollar" causes dealers to sell firearms to underage youth (Q37).	.430	.309	-.013	.018
The federal government should assist schools in developing programs that deter violence (Q69).	.418	.399	-.111	.082
The federal government should assist schools in developing programs that deter violence (Q69).	.418	.399	-.111	.082
Students are responsible for their own attitudes toward violence (Q14).	.410	.021	-.113	.201
Students are responsible for their own attitudes toward violence (Q14).	.410	.021	-.113	.201
Unpopular students are more prone to commit acts of violence (Q52).	.401	.026	-.026	.020
Unpopular students are more prone to commit acts of violence (Q52).	.401	.026	-.026	.020
Teachers are a target for acts of violence (Q53).	.400	.007	.397	-.381
Teachers are a target for acts of violence (Q53).	.400	.007	.397	-.381
Violence in schools is not a problem (Q67).	-.385	.016	.274	-.289
Violence in schools is not a problem (Q67).	-.385	.016	.274	-.289
Teachers are so respected that they need not be concerned about violence in schools (Q66).	-.381	.140	.216	.202
Teachers are so respected that they need not be concerned about violence in schools (Q66).	-.381	.140	.216	.202
Taking prayer out of schools has had an impact on student values (Q33).	.288	.095	.075	.286
Lack of student self-esteem is a key to student violence (Q51).	.197	-.001	.028	.104

The availability of firearms is to blame for school violence (Q8).	.183	**.605**	-.056	.056
The print medium contributes to student attitude toward violence (Q21).	.164	**.594**	.175	-.348
Society is responsible for student attitudes toward violence (Q12).	.242	**.579**	.151	-.076
TV and radio shows are to blame for school violence (Q5).	.040	**.574**	.278	.016
Movies and television can help to control school violence (Q60).	.163	**.536**	-.149	.008
Movies are responsible for student attitudes toward violence (Q11).	.038	**.473**	.090	-.089
Individual communities are to blame for school violence (Q7).	-.111	**.456**	.176	.133
New school programs can reduce school violence (Q68).	.174	.439	-.100	.123
Present firearm laws are not enforced (Q16).	.248	.414	-.160	-.054
Congress is responsible for youth access to firearms (Q36).	.112	.383	.252	-.141
Schools can control student violence (Q62).	.087	.368	.230	.179
Churches have failed the youth of America (Q35).	-.223	.325	.207	-.170
New laws should be developed to control access to firearms (Q20).	.154	.270	-.191	-.030
Students who seem not to fit in are more prone to violence (Q50).	.128	.222	.014	.117
Communities can help control school violence (Q61)	.024	.153	-.010	.062
Social services are responsible for youth violence (Q18).	-.322	.097	**.592**	.164
Teacher behavior can promote violence (Q54).	.205	-.396	**.589**	.095
Schools are responsible for school violence (Q55)	.008	-.063	**.579**	.045
Police are responsible for violence (Q17).	-.144	.052	**.576**	.030
Individual communities are responsible for student attitudes toward violence (Q13).	-.021	.113	**.529**	.307
Welfare is responsible for youth violence (Q19).	-.324	.058	**.523**	.133
Single parenthood is responsible for youth violence (Q39).	-.316	.095	**.517**	.177
Peers are responsible for student attitudes toward violence (Q9).	.250	.147	**.486**	-.019
Peers are responsible for student attitudes toward violence (Q9).	.250	.147	**.486**	-.019
Post-nuclear families (both parents working) are responsible for student violence (Q40)	-.349	.109	**.485**	.140
Post-nuclear families (both parents working) are responsible for student violence (Q40)	-.349	.109	**.485**	.140
Society in general is to blame for school violence (Q6).	.175	.436	**.458**	.162
Society in general is to blame for school violence (Q6).	.175	.436	**.458**	.162
Parents are to blame for school violence (Q4).	-.041	.313	.441	.181
Parents are to blame for school violence (Q4).	-.041	.313	.441	.181
Violence in schools involves only a few students (Q64)	-.130	-.110	.368	.132
Violence in schools involves only a few students (Q64)	-.130	-.110	.368	.132
There is too much violence in homes (Q56)	.298	.103	.318	.019
There is too much violence in homes (Q56)	.298	.103	.318	.019
Drugs are responsible for student violence (Q48).	.122	.102	.074	**.640**
Drugs are responsible for student violence (Q48).	.122	.102	.074	**.640**
Cults are responsible for student violence (Q25).	.088	-.049	.295	**.639**
Cults are responsible for student violence (Q25).	.088	-.049	.295	**.639**
Alcohol is responsible for student violence (Q49).	.061	.148	.092	**.615**
Alcohol is responsible for student violence (Q49).	.061	.148	.092	**.615**
Student attitudes toward violence are formed in early childhood (Q22).	-.072	-.102	.301	**.587**
Teachers are in harm's way (Q63).	.269	.112	.150	**-.561**

More talented and creative students seem to resort to violence (Q32).	-.118	.055	.117	**.484**
Parents can control children's violence (Q59).	.046	.084	.145	**.457**
Church membership would affect today's violence (Q34).	.238	.165	.126	.249
Parents are responsible for student attitudes toward violence (Q10).	.099	-.006	.213	.240
More intelligent students resort to violence (Q31).	.043	-.042	.158	.164
The NRA is responsible for youth violence (Q38).	-.107	.130	.062	.152

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics—Means (Standard Deviations)

		Subscale		
	Tendency Toward Violence	Media Influences	Social Influences	Mental/Mind-Altering Influences
Parents	4.5 (.5)	4.4 (.7)	1.8 (.7)	3.4 (1.4)
Students	3.8 (2.4)	3.2 (1.4)	2.4 (1.0)	3.5 (1.1)